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December 13, 1979

ANGLICAN PRIMATES HAVE EXCHANGE FORUM AT ELY

ELY, England -- The heads of the 25 autonomous provinces within the Anglican Communion, meeting here Nov. 26 - Dec. 1, have issued guidelines reaffirming statements made by the 1978 Lambeth Conference concerning visits by lawfully ordained women priests to provinces which do not ordain women.

The 1978 Lambeth guidelines assert the autonomy of each Anglican province, calling on all concerned to abide by the customary procedures and courtesies which apply in the exercise of ministry by women and men. They call on those seeking to enter other provinces to abide by "the formal resolutions or regulations of that province" and where no formal decision about women priests has been made, the guidelines say that the direction of the diocesan bishop, made after consultation with the Primate of the province, should be followed.

The guidelines issued by the Primates also reaffirm Resolution 15 of the fourth Anglican Consultative Council in Canada last May, which asks for continued discussion of the whole issue of women priests.

The Rt. Rev. John M. Allin, Presiding Bishop of the 3 million-member Episcopal Church, represented the United States branch of the Anglican Communion.

High on the agenda of the Primates were various ecumenical concerns, such as the three Agreed Statements on the Eucharist, ordained ministry, and authority in the church, which have been issued in recent years by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Theological Commission.

The Primates warmly encouraged continued deepening of relationships among Christians, both internationally and at the local level.

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At a press conference following the adjournment of the meeting, a question was asked about what was meant in the official released statement that "the tide was not flowing strongly for inter-Church conversations." The Primus of the Episcopal Church in Scotland, Bishop Alastair Haggart, said that after the initial euphoria, where it looks as if good and a little intelligence will overcome every obstacle, "gradually you move on to areas where the deep, not very well understood factors that divide the churches and people become apparent. You begin to suffer from weariness in well doing. "

Following a report by the Rt. Rev. Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, Bishop of Iran, the Primates sent a confidential letter to the Ambassador of Iran in London, aimed at improving the situation of Christians in that country.

The Rt. Rev. Gilbert Baker, Bishop of Hong Kong, reported on the Anglican Church in China. At the closing press conference, Archbishop Donald Coggan of Canterbury, who chaired the sessions, said that news was now coming out about corporate worship and churches reopening.

"After this long seclusion of the Chinese Church from the West from 1950 onwards," he said, "it's difficult to get an overall pattern. But a certain number of Chinese Christians have recently visited America and Canada."

Asked about the state of the Anglican Church in China, Archbishop Coggan said one Anglican bishop was still alive but was not functioning in that capacity. Bishop John Howe, Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council, added: "Apart from Roman Catholics, the position in China seems to be that the denominations, as known in the West, hardly exist any more. People worship in the main in private houses.

"Any shaping of Christians will be decided from China, by the Church in China, which does not want to be told how by enthusiastic people in the West," he said.

The Primates emphasized the international nature of the Anglican Communion, in their statement. They pointed out that while English was their common tongue, the range of language spoken by particular Primates "rivalled the disciples on the day of Pentecost -- from the more familiar spanish, Portugese, French and Swahili to Krio, Mende/Temne, Moru, Orakaiva and Roviana."

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While they were in session, the Primates heard of the death of the Primate of The Church in the Province of the West Indies, who was also Bishop of Guyana, Archbishop Alan Knight, 78. He had been prevented by illness from attending.

Describing the meeting as "a great success," the Archbishop of Canterbury said, "We've learned a great deal from one another and have been united in a personal way." The discussions took place in the context of worship, he said.

The Ely assembly was the first of its kind in Anglicanism and the Primates indicated a desire to meet regularly. Another such meeting is expected to take place in 1982 and every two or three years thereafter. In 1982 the Primates hope to be able to narrow discussions to two or three major topics. Some leaders expressed the hope they could meet somewhere outside the United Kingdom.

This meeting of the heads of the provinces was suggested by the Primates' committee which met during the 1978 Lambeth Conference in Canterbury. Like other Anglican international bodies, such as the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates' meeting had no legislative powers.

The enthronement of the Rt. Rev. Robert A.K. Runcie as Archbishop of Canterbury on March 25, 1980, will provide a visual expression of the international character of the Anglican Communion. Primates will be invited to play a distinctive part "to emphasize the fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury enjoys a Primacy of honor and respect in the worldwide fellowship of Anglican Churches."

Archbishop Donald Coggan is scheduled to retire in January as spiritual leader of the 65 million-member Anglican Communion.

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PICTURE CAPTION

79382 Presiding Bishop John M. Allin of the Episcopal Church, right, talks informally with Bishop Robert A.K. Runcie of St. Albans during a meeting of the 25 Primates of the Anglican Communion in Ely, Nov. 26 - Dec. 1. Bishop Runcie will be enthroned on March 25 as the 102nd Archbishop of Canterbury in succession of Augustine who assumed the post in 601.

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